

Free Information Note No.3

Making Pillow Covers and Cover Cloths

For a domed lace pillow

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Pillow Covers and Cover Cloths

When making bobbin lace a variety of cloths are used for different purposes. The lace pillow should always have a loose cover that can be removed for laundering and we may need to use two or three cloths when making the lace. When the pillow is not in use it should be covered with a large cover cloth, to protect the work from dust particles and, if you own pets, from stray hairs from your cat or dog.

A pillow cover or loose cover is a large, circular cloth with a hem casing that has an elastic or tape drawstring threaded through. Before the drawstring is tightened, the cover resembles a large fabric shower cap. The cloth is much larger than the diameter of the pillow and the extra fabric is pulled underneath the base and pulled taut with the drawstring. The fabric over the top surface of the pillow lies flat and smooth, whilst the excess fabric is gathered underneath the pillow. The gathered fabric lies between the base of the pillow and the surface you sit the pillow on when working the lace.

A large cover cloth is simply a large square of hemmed fabric, used to protect the pillow and work in progress from dust etc., when the pillow is not in use.

The cover cloths are rectangular pieces of hemmed fabric that have a variety of uses. I suggest you make three of these. One is used as a '*pillow skirt*', which is the name for any cloth placed between the pricking and the threads whilst work is in progress. When fine thread is being used, two further cloths are used to cover the edges of the pricking (pattern), to protect the threads from rubbing against a rough edge of card. The cloths are used interchangeably.

The cover cloths and pillow cover should be made from a smooth fabric that is closely woven and of a medium dark colour that does not pill or fluff. Cotton poplin, headcloth, gabardine, or smooth shirt weight fabrics will meet the requirements. Plain coloured fabrics are easier on the eyes when working than patterned fabrics.

When working with white, cream or pastel coloured threads, you need a dark coloured fabric so that the light threads are easy to see. My preference is for a medium dark colour, rather than a Navy blue, maroon, or black, and a muted tone rather than a bright colour. If you want to see what you are doing, *Flouro colours* are definitely out!

When working with dark coloured threads, cream, pastel or light shades of fabric are easier on the eyes than stark white.

If you do not have a sewing machine and do not know how to sew, improvise by using pillowslips (pillowcases), plain dyed tea-towels (dish-cloths/wiping-up cloths) or fabric table napkins, until you can ask a friend or neighbor to do it for you. Some suppliers of lacemaking materials and equipment will stock pre-made cover cloths.

Section A

Working out the fabric requirements

If you intend to use the example measurements and make cloths to the given dimensions, *work with one set of measurements only*. Use either the inch measurements, or the centimetre measurements, but not both. The two are not interchangeable because the centimetres are rounded up or down to whole numbers.

All example measurements are for a 20inch/ 50cm diameter pillow and I stress, once again, the dimensions given are suggested sizes only.

1. Pillow cover or loose cover for the pillow

Note: *The loose cover begins as a square of fabric from which a circle is cut later.*

Rough formula for establishing fabric requirement:

Top diameter of pillow + turn under (x2) + hem casing for drawstring (x2).

Measuring the top diameter of the pillow: Measure over the middle of the pillow. Run a tape measure from the bottom rim on one side of the baseboard, over the middle of the dome and down to the bottom rim on the opposite side.



For the turn under: I suggest a minimum allowance of 3inches/7cm and a maximum of 5inches/12cm. The finished hem casing need not be more than 1/2inch/1.5cm wide as 1/8 or 1/4inch/3 or 6mm wide elastic is all that is needed. I suggest using elastic because it is stronger than any of the available woven tapes that I know about.

Example approach to working out fabric requirements:

If you have a pillow with a base diameter of 20inches/50cm and an approximate height of 2inches/5cm, when you measure over the top of the pillow you should have a final measurement of 22inches/55cm, give or take a little.

Example Measurement	Inches	Centimetres
Top diameter of pillow	=22	=55
Plus turn under fabric width	3 (x 2) = 6	7 (x2) =14
Plus total casing allowance	1 (x 2) = 2	2 (x2) = 4
Total Allowance	= 30	=73

Having worked out the required amount of fabric for the pillow cover, the next step is to work out the size of the large cover cloth and the three smaller cloths.

The fabric pieces for the cover cloths do not have to be any fixed size.

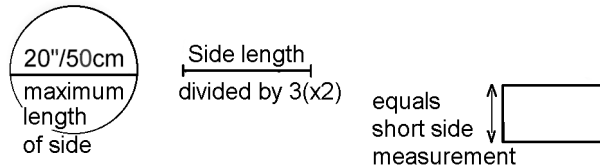
2. A rough guide for the size of the cloths

For the large cloth used for covering the pillow, I begin with the same measurement as for the pillow cover; i.e. based on the above measurements, I would need a piece of fabric measuring 30inches/73cm square. The cover can be smaller than this but this size is large enough to tuck under the bottom of the pillow.

For the three smaller cover cloths, I suggest the long sides of the rectangles should not exceed the diameter measurement of the pillow base, nor be less than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the base measurement.



The short sides should not exceed $\frac{2}{3}$ the length of the long sides, nor be less than half the length. **For example:**



Having said that, however, I look for the most economical layout for the width of fabric available and I will adjust the sizes if necessary. See example below.

Section B

1. Finding the most economical fabric layout

Take the side measurement of the square for the pillow cover (loose cover) as the starting point. Subtract that figure from the standard widths of available fabric. The difference between the two is then compared to the long side or short side measurements of the rectangular cloths, to see whether there is sufficient, useable width in the remaining fabric to be an economical purchase.

Fabric width (inches) minus side length of pillow cover	Fabric width (metric) minus side length of pillow cover
36 " - 30" = 6" <i>too little for a cover cloth</i>	90cm - 73cm = 17cm <i>too little for a cover cloth</i>
45" - 30" = 15" <i>good length for the short sides</i>	112cm - 73cm = 39cm <i>good length for the short sides</i>

<i>No inch equivalent</i>	115cm -73cm = 42cm <i>good width</i>
54"- 30" =24" <i>cloths would be too wide for the short sides and too short for the long sides.</i>	140cm-73cm = 67cm <i>cloths would be too wide for the short sides and too short for the long sides.</i>
60"- 30" =30" <i>sufficient for the large square cloth</i>	150cm-73cm = 77cm <i>sufficient for the large square cloth</i>

Next, add together the side measurement of both the pillow cover and the large cover cloth. Take this as the fabric *length requirement*; 30+30inches/73+73cm amounts to a total of 60inches/146cm (the metric measure would be **rounded up to 150cm**).

This number is divide by three, in order to find whether there would be sufficient fabric for the length of the three cloths; 60" divided by 3 = 20inches/ 150cm divided by 3 = 50cm.

2. Working with the measurements in the table:

Fabric width of 45inches/ 112cm: If both the pillow cover and the large cover cloth are cut from the *length*, three smaller cover cloths can be cut out from the remaining width of fabric; each small rectangle would measure 15inches *wide* by 20inches *long*/ 39cm wide by 50cm *long*. Purchase a piece of fabric 1-3/8yards (or round up to 1-3/4yds)/ 1.5m(150cm) in length.

Fabric width of 115cm: If both the pillow cover and large cover cloth are cut from the *length*, there will be sufficient fabric in the remaining width for three smaller cover cloths, each measuring 42cm wide by 50cm long. Purchase a piece of fabric 1.5m(150cm) in length.

Fabric 54inches/140cm wide: Ignore because the remaining fabric width is not suitable for either of the side measurements. Far too much wastage for this example size pillow.

Fabric 60inches/150cm wide: Both the pillow cover and the large cover cloth can be cut from the *width* of the fabric. If you divide the *width* of the fabric by 3, this will give you a *long side measurement* for each of the smaller cover cloths and you will be able to work out how much extra fabric you will require in the *length*.

For example: 60inches/150cm, divided by 3 = 20inches/50cm.

This is plenty for the *long side* measurement of the rectangular cloths. Just add a little more for the *short side* measurement of the rectangles. I would suggest adding a further 15inches/38cm of fabric for the short side measurement.

Added to the 30inch/73cm length already needed for the square cloths, the final length of fabric needed would amount to (30inches+15inches)=1-1/4yards/ (73cm+38cm) =111cm (**rounded up to 1.12m/112cm**).

The layout for pillows of other dimensions may be quite different.

Section C.

Making a pattern for the pillow cover:

Once you have purchased the fabric it must be ironed and the top and bottom edges evened up. Once that has been done and the fabric cut into the necessary pieces, a circle must be cut out from one of the large squares.

This circle has a large radius measurement and you will need to use either a pair of compasses with an extension arm, or the pin and string method of drawing an arc.

1. For the compass method you will need the following:

- A large square of paper or several pieces of paper stuck together with an adhesive tape. The paper must be large enough to draw a full circle of the diameter needed. Newspaper can be used for this.
- Newspaper or firm cardboard to lay the paper on. It must be thick so the points of the thumbtacks do not damage the work surface underneath.
- Soft compass lead or suitable pencil
- Adhesive tape, either sticky tape, masking tape, or similar.
- Scissors.

Divide by 2, the width measurement of the fabric square. This gives you the correct *radius measurement* for the circle. Work as follows:

- Set the compass arm to the correct *radius measurement*, then reduce it by *just a fraction*. The curved line will lie just inside the edges of the square.
- Fasten the edges of the square of paper to the newspaper using tape.
- Find the centre point of the paper square.
- Position the compass point exactly in the centre and scribe a circle.
- Lift the paper and cut out the circle.
- Lay the paper circle over the fabric square and tape the paper to the fabric.
- Cut away the excess fabric.

2. For the string method you will need the following:

- A large square of paper or several pieces of paper stuck together with an adhesive tape. The paper must be large enough to draw a full circle of the diameter needed. Newspaper can be used for this.
- Marking pencil/marker pen
- A length of string, longer than the radius measurement, measured after tying around the pen/marker
- Thumbtacks (drawing pin) to pin the pattern paper onto.

- Thick newspaper or cardboard or other firm surface the thumbtacks can be pushed into.
- Ruler or tape measure
- Sharp scissors
- Adhesive tape, either sticky tape, masking tape or similar.

Divide by 2, the width measurement of the fabric square. This gives you the correct *radius measurement* for the circle of the paper pattern. Work as follows:

- Lay out the large paper square on top of the newspaper or cardboard. Secure the paper with thumbtacks.
- Find the centre point of the paper and mark it.
- Tie a knot at one end of the string. Push the pin of a thumbtack through the knot and pull the knot taut.
- Make a slipknot/finger knot in the other end of the string and slip the pencil/marker into the loop.
- Pull the string taut. Measure the taut string from the point of the tack to the point of the pencil/marker. Adjust the slipknot as necessary to achieve the actual radius. Then shorten the string *just a fraction*. The curved line will now lie just inside the edges of the fabric square.
- Tape the string to the pencil/marker to maintain the measurement.
- Push the thumbtack into the centre point of the paper.
- Place the thumb of one hand on the thumbtack to hold it in place. Stretch the string taut then draw a circle.
- Unpin the paper and cut out the circle.
- Lay the fabric over the newspaper/cardboard.
- Lay the paper pattern over the fabric square and tape the edges of the paper to the fabric.
- Cut away the excess fabric.

Section D.

1. Making the pillow cover

Working with the wrong side of the fabric facing up:

- Measure and fold in a width of fabric 1/8inch/3-4mm.
- Pin, press and stitch as close to the fold as possible.

- Fold the fabric again, forming a casing of approximately 1/2inch/1-1.5cm in width. Form small pleats to accommodate the curve if necessary.
- Somewhere around the curve, position two pins, approximately 1 inch, or 25mm apart. This short section is not to be sewn because you need an opening for the elastic.
- Press, pin and stitch the outside of the hem from pin to pin. Stitch as close to the outside edge of the fold as possible.
- The inside edge must be sewn a second time. Sew just inside the first line of stitches.
- Tie off all the thread ends securely.
- Thread elastic onto a safety pin or a bodkin. Secure the other end to prevent it slipping inside the casing. Feed the elastic through the opening and inside the hem.

2. Making the cover cloths

The large cover cloth may be hemmed however you wish.

The rectangular cloths should be sewn with soft hems because, when in use, they are pinned to the pillow at the top of the hem. Turn only a narrow width at the raw edge then turn a second, wider fold of fabric. Reinforce the outside edge with a row of stitching.

Section E.

Fitting the cover over the pillow

Lay the cover right side down on a table or other surface. With the base of the pillow uppermost, lay it down on top of the fabric. Draw the elastic tight. Adjust the cover so there is an even amount of pleated fabric all round.

The pillow cover must be pulled tight so there are no wrinkles on the top surface, the wrinkles should be in the excess fabric underneath and just across the rim of the pillow.

Tighten the elastic as much as you can, then tie the elastic into a bow with a double knot. Tuck the ends under the edge of the cover.

When the cloths are made and the pillow fitted into its cover, you will have all the components needed to *dress the pillow*¹ and protect the work in progress.

¹ *Dressing the pillow* is the term used for arranging the cover cloths over a pricking, prior to working.